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BALTIC PANIC EU VS. RUSSIA

A 52' Film directed by Frédéric COMPAIN & Benoît LABORDE
Produced by ARTLINE FILMS

The Baltic Sea became a major geopolitical hotspot. Natural border between 8 countries of the EU and Russia, it crystallised many strategic issues: gas pipelines, territories and foreign political influences...

THE PITCH

How a small cold sea, shallow and long left to fishermen and amber dealers, has become in a few years, one of the tension spots. Since the fall of the USSR, it has become a major issue and, more than ever, the future of the European Union is largely played out in this «northern Mediterranean» confronted with the great Asian powers, Russia in the lead.

Militarization of borders and major staff maneuvers: Northern Europe is undoubtedly afraid, and is saying so. In the Baltic States, but also in the quiet Scandinavian peninsula, such bellicose rumours have not been heard since the end of the Cold War.

It is that with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, **Vladimir Putin's Russia has struck hard**. Very hard. It was not content, as in 2013, to put pressure on diplomats to prevent Ukraine from signing the European Union Association Agreement, not only did it support secessionist movements as in the Donbass: it sent its national army to the gates of the Union and conducted a blitzkrieg campaign under the nose of Kiyv's new allies. This is the first time that Moscow has dared to challenge Brussels on military grounds.

Of course, this revived old fears that are still very present in the former «sister republics» of the USSR. On the Baltic side (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), there has long been a fear of a similar intervention, based as in Ukraine, on the separatism of the Russian-speaking populations, but now the «wise» Swedes, Norwegians and Finns are also preparing very seriously for future military operations, on the land of the islands as well as in the Baltic Sea. Will we soon see the Russian army engage in the very heart of European territory? Are Europe and NATO still a sufficient deterrent to protect a coveted territory?



The war has already begun...

It regularly mobilizes «shadow troops» during spectacular hackings carried out not only against national institutions and European public services, but also, increasingly, against the NATO military stationed in large numbers in the region. On the IT front, the threat is becoming increasingly clearer and closer to the headquarters.

This «shadow war» being waged on the borders of geopolitics and piracy does not prevent a rearmament that is very officially promoted by the Russian authorities in Moscow as well as in Kaliningrad, the small Russian exclave in the heart of Europe. New missile batteries, spectacular manoeuvres and increasingly frequent incursions outside territorial waters and air space. This is what has brought the Scandinavians out of their traditional pacifist reserve.

It is now clear that the time when Europeans could consider the Baltic as «their» lake is over: **Russia intends to reclaim its shores lost with the end of the USSR and is confronting Brussels with an unprecedented challenge.** The stakes are indeed high and are not limited to a dispute over sovereignty between rival powers. For Europe, the Baltic Sea is **a strategic hydrocarbon supply corridor**, and the heated debates over the construction of the NordStream gas pipelines are causing deep discord within the EU member states.

THE FILM

Small islands and big maneuvers

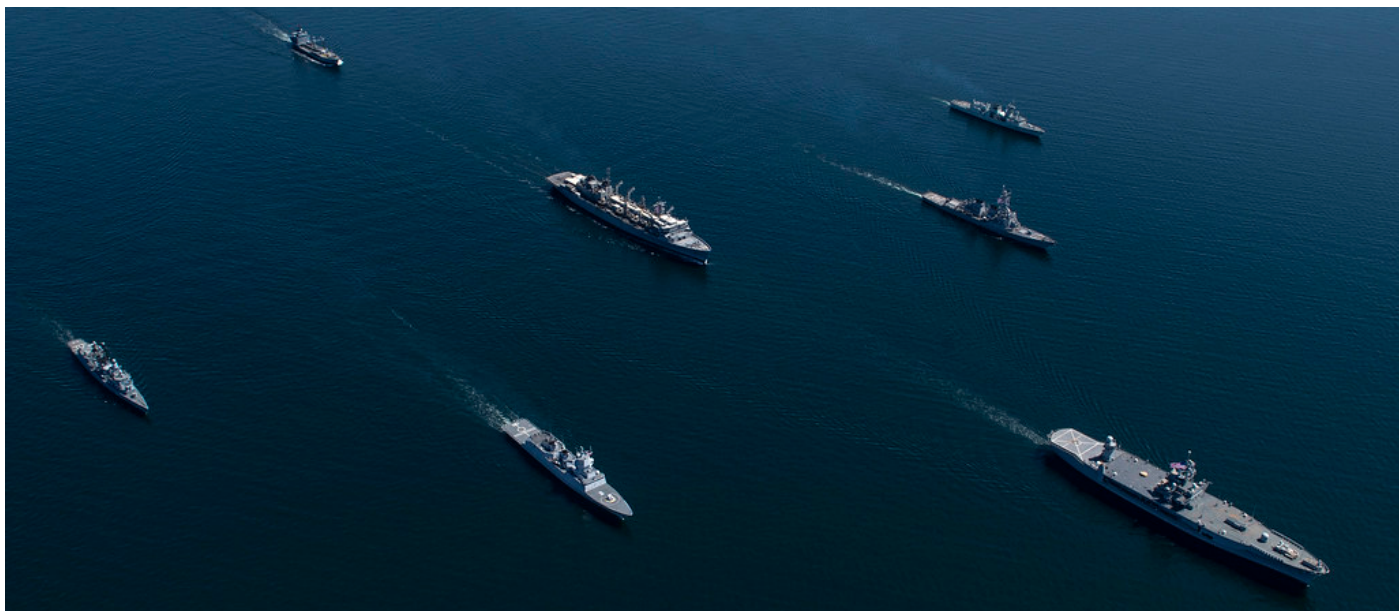
August 2020, on the island of Gotland, less than 90 km off Stockholm.

Alarm sirens and the sound of boots. Swedish army planes fly over the area while the army deploys its contingents of men in arms. The 800 km of coastline is bristling with tanks and anti-missile batteries. Never before seen since the end of the Cold War on this small island of barely 300 hectares ...

The enemy is not named but it is Vladimir Putin's Russia. **For several years now, the master of the Kremlin has been worrying all his neighbors and the peaceful Swedish kingdom is now taking action.**

National service was reinstated in 2017, the army has reinstalled a permanent base on the island of Gotland, which was completely demilitarized in the early 2000s. National security expenses are skyrocketing.

So is Northern Europe, at the edge of the Arctic Circle, preparing for the return of the Cold War? **What is really going on on the island of Gotland and in the entire Baltic Sea, of which it is the epicenter?**



Back under the flag

Outside the major international institutions, within the national framework, the military is increasingly listened to and conscription is coming back everywhere: in Sweden in 2017, in Lithuania in 2015 and even in Norway since 2013. In Sweden, breaking with decades of pacifist tradition, growing threats from Russia have led to a new demand for conscripts: 7,000 positions were still vacant before 2017. Now, Sweden trains 5,000 new soldiers a year during a 9-month military service. From Vilnius (Lithuania) to Stockholm and Oslo, therefore, barracks are being reopened and future conscripts are being produced at high speed, proof that the «crisis» of confidence is now structural and not just temporary.

But why so much concern? Why has the crisis in Crimea, far from the shores of the Baltic Sea, so altered the quiet optimism of northern Europe and radically transformed the context of international relations?

Is Europe really afraid of a Russian military invasion ?

Crimea - 2014, one-off operation or dress rehearsal. This is the first act of war waged by Russia against a European state. **Never before have the - recurring - tensions between the European Union, NATO and Russia been so high...**

In only one month, from February to March 2014, Vladimir Putin has deeply shaken his European neighbors, especially the Nordic ones. The annexation of Crimea by Russian troops suddenly gave reason to the concerns of the former Soviet republics and countries bordering Russia. **If he did it once, Putin will not hesitate to do it again...**

On April 10, 2016, moreover - and for the first time in history - Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland chose to hold a joint press conference to denounce Russian operations in Ukraine and call Russia's attitude «the most important challenge to security in Europe.»

And, in fact, since 2014, other front lines have gradually emerged: in the South Caucasus, first, and especially in the Baltic Sea. This is a major turning point for this sea, which had weathered the tensions of the Cold War as best it could. This will significantly change the interpretation of Moscow's actions in the region.



Echoes of the Ukrainian crisis in the Baltic area

Around the Baltic Sea, Russia's power of nuisance is taking on increasingly varied, more numerous and more intense forms.

Visible and spectacular forms, first of all, when Russian planes illegally flew over the Estonian sky in 2019 or grazed warships in 2016.

More devious and secret forms when Swedish fishermen spot Russian submarines in their territorial waters or when Russian hackers cause huge internet blackouts in Estonia, Poland and even in NATO command centers.

A permanent attempt at destabilization, therefore, which analysts call the «new normal» and which aims to maintain constant pressure on Europeans - on the former Soviet satellites in particular and off its territorial waters on the other hand.

Kaliningrad, a Permanent War Scene for the European Public.

The epicenter of this new military activity is undoubtedly the Kaliningrad Oblast, a Russian «island» in the heart of Europe.

Kaliningrad seems to serve as a showcase for the Russian army to scare its European neighbors and, as long as it is going to put on a big show, it might as well put together the best possible cast! The latest Russian maneuvers in Kaliningrad have invited China with great fanfare: Putin and Xi Jinping together in the heart of Europe, that is indeed enough to raise the emotion in the general public.

For the time being, at least, we are left with arm wrestling, shows of force, attempts at intimidation and unfriendly statements. Prelude to future developments or permanent status quo? It is difficult to predict the future: **all options are open...**

BEHIND THE MILITARY, A NEW RUSSIAN POLICY OF INFLUENCE IN THE BALTIC SEA?

On the Baltic side, a return ticket to the Soviet Union?

On the other side of the sea, on the eastern shore. Here, in the Baltic States, the ruins of the Soviet empire still stand everywhere...

Let's remember: before 1989, the Baltic Sea was almost entirely Russian. The Baltic republics did not exist, Finland was linked to the USSR by bilateral agreements that gave Moscow a free hand, and more than a quarter of the Union's commercial traffic was exported through its western seaboard, stretching from St. Petersburg to East Germany. Everything changed in the early 1990s.



On August 23, 1989, nearly two million citizens joined together in a human chain 600 km long, for fifteen minutes, to demand the departure of the Russians.

Thus, **in just fifteen years, the Soviet coastal front was dismantled piece by piece**, Russia having kept only the bottom of the Gulf of Finland and its enclave of Kaliningrad. This was an unprecedented humiliation as well as a gigantic economic and strategic loss: all the major ports of the former USSR suddenly moved to the West and the Russian Baltic became a true «European lake». **The kind of slap in the face that the Kremlin has never really recovered from...**

The Baltic countries were not immediately perceived as strategic by the EU, even after 1990. The late opening up (train and highway) is now fundamental and triggers powerful European investments (Rail Baltica project).

But if Europe realized this a little late, Russia immediately understood that it was losing a lot by losing its maritime façade. Hence the old and structural concern of the Baltic chancelleries.



Moscow's eye is always wide open

The Baltic States were the first to worry about the awakening of Russian power. Indeed, for them, in concrete terms, the territorial continuity with continental Russia and the absence of relief separating the current Federation from its former satellites have always made the military option particularly credible.

Moreover, Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius were subjected to the first large-scale hacking attempts: the Baltic capitals know from the inside **the new means Russia has acquired to control its neighbors**.

For them, the 2014 crisis was just an announcement effect, confirmed since then by the 2020 crisis in Belarus, which saw the Kremlin obviously orchestrating Lukashenko's victory over his opponents with impunity.

Today, most of the Belarusian opponents of 2020 are refugees in the Baltic States where they are setting up a government in exile (visit of Svetlana Tikhonovskaya in France on September 15, 2021).

Their testimonies remind us of how Moscow intends to « tidy up » its former Soviet prefecture, without necessarily mobilizing its army.

Kaliningrad on the ground: a corridor under construction?

Seen from the Baltic States, the Belarusian crisis also has very concrete and pragmatic consequences. They are concentrated in the «Suwalki gap», which can easily be filmed from southern Lithuania or northern Poland.

The «Suwalki gap» is a narrow strip of land that marks the Lithuanian-Polish border on the one hand, but could just as easily connect Belarus to Kaliningrad from east to west... This is how the Russian protagonists and their allies describe it.

Enclosed behind a high fence, the Russian oblast suffers from its isolation and distance from the rest of Russia. If it could be connected to Minsk through the Suwalski gap, its current governor, Anton Alikhanov, assures us that he has plenty of economic development projects for the inhabitants!

Of course, neither Lithuania, which borders the «Suwalki gap» to the north, nor Poland, which owns the southern side of it, want to hear about a logistics tunnel on their territory, and **Russia readily concludes that it must defend its interests alone in a perpetually hostile environment.** Officially, moreover, no one thinks of accusing Moscow of military intentions! No, if all the borders are walled, grilled and militarized, it is for purely economic reasons...



THE BALTIC SEA, FUTURE LINK BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC AND EUROPEAN MARKETS?

St. Petersburg, the showcase of Russia's new maritime ambitions

If Kaliningrad remains in the hands of the military for the time being, the other Russian shoreline in the Baltic Sea, the St. Petersburg region, presents a completely different face. It is a vast array of containers, cranes and brand new logistics platforms.

For example, the port of Primorsk is now the second largest seaport in Russia. Inaugurated in 2001 by Vladimir Putin himself, it has since been subjected to gigantic investments. With two new terminals, it faces the other major port infrastructure of the Leningrad Oblast, the port of Ust-Luga. Two citadels on either side of the Gulf of Finland leading to St. Petersburg.

How far it seems from the Summer Palace of Peter the Great - who had decided to create «his» city here in the 18th century to thwart the ambitions of the Swedish kingdom!

For Vladimir Putin's new Russia, it is the roads that count: if the port area has been transformed at great expense, it is first and foremost to provide Russia with modern infrastructures, capable of reconnecting the country to the challenges of globalization.

Nord Stream, Putin's tentacle towards Europe

These issues are primarily energy-related. Russian gas is crucial for the European Union and Europe, despite the tensions, remains a loyal customer.

Until 2014, the gas passed mainly through Ukrainian pipes. The same ones that Moscow decided to close in retaliation against the «orange revolution» in Kiyv. A heavy decision for the Ukrainian economy but not so painful for Moscow: **Russian gas is no longer obliged to transit through the Ukrainian plains.**

And for good reason: **in 2011 Russia inaugurated the first undersea gas pipeline linking the Gulf of Finland to the German coastline.** It is called NordStream and it has not ceased to create turmoil even within European countries and their American allies.

For the Russians, NordStream is a good deal. For the Europeans, it is more complicated: Ukraine and its anti-Russian supporters see it as a betrayal from Germany, which is accused of endorsing Russia's policy of bypassing Ukraine; Germany, on the other hand, argues that it badly needs Russian gas.



Nord Stream 2: the current is no longer flowing within the Union

Nord Stream 2 began to see the light of day in April 2018 but, as of December 2019, the work was interrupted at the request of the United States (Donald Trump), furious to see Germany taking up the cause of the Russian enemy.

Opposition to the Nord Stream 2 project is therefore a matter of community sovereignty, and today places Germany in a delicate position: anxious to maintain good relations with the Kremlin, **Berlin is now being accused of «selling» the energy future of the Old Continent to its powerful neighbor.**

Environmental protection, a new geopolitical weapon

If one follows the route of the two parallel gas pipelines, one strangely finds this whole series of islands and strategic islets that concentrate military tensions, starting with the island of Gotland.

Of course, Sweden was quick to send observers to monitor birds, fish, coastal pollution and water quality! **It is not certain that Nord Stream 2 will emerge unscathed from the accusations of «environmental crime» that are regularly brought against it...**

Nord Stream, the first route of a future strategic crossroads?

The argument is all the more effective as Western leaders know they are bound by the promises of the Cop21. **And this at a time when global warming is precisely offering new opportunities to their Russian neighbor!**

The thawing of the ice in the Arctic is indeed the great business of contemporary Russia: new roads to the Great North, new drilling, new hydrocarbon deposits... New markets and new outlets are needed for this manna coming from the cold.

And the Baltic is strategically located halfway to the Pole and its future clients.

Numerous pipeline projects, cross-border routes and traffic corridors are currently being studied between Russia, Norway, Finland, but also Iceland, the United States, Canada and China.

These routes necessarily pass or will pass through the Baltic Sea, its islands and gulfs. They are currently fuelling tensions between the countries bordering the Baltic Sea; tomorrow they will perhaps encourage the sharing of resources.

In the meantime, the sea itself is full of plastic, rusty metals, oil slicks and the bottom of hastily degassed tanks. A mute witness to the great gesticulations of men on its surface.



SPEAKERS

Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Minister of Defence

Peter Hultqvist, Swedish Minister of Defence

Jens Stoltenberg, current secretary general of NATO. (Norwegian).

Colonel Olivier Waché, chief of French military detachment in Lithuania.

Alice Guitton, Director General of International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS) from the Ministry of Armed Forces.

Ingrida Šimonytė, prime minister of Lithuania.

Robert Dalsjö, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) analyst

Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia from 1999 to 2003

Kaja Kallas, prime minister of Estonia since January 2021

Viktoryia Andrukovic, Belarusian student refugee in Lithuania.

Vadzim Vileita, journalist and political analyst.

Anton Alikhanov, Russian governor of Kaliningrad Oblast.

Mikhail Mishustin, Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation.

Barbara Kunz, Center for Baltic and East European Studies.

Alexey Miller, Chairman of the Management Committee of Gazprom

Michał Kurtyka, Polish Secretary of State in the Ministry of Energy.

ARTLINE FILMS

Founded in 1986, Artline Films has produced more than 150 films, documentaries and feature films with the main French broadcasters and many foreign partners such as PBS, WNET, YLE, CBC, RTBF, SIC, RTS, NPS, NMO, TV Ontario, SBS, WDR... Today, Artline Films divides its activity between important productions with a strong international potential, first films as well as «essays» by experienced directors. The themes covered in the catalog include international issues and history, art and culture, science and discovery, and social issues. Artline Films has won numerous awards and selections at major international festivals.

Recent films co-produced with ARTE include:

2019 *EMBARGO SUR L'IRAN*

2019 *MAIN BASSE SUR VOTRE MEDECINE*

2019 «*LE MEXIQUE DANS L'OBJECTIF*» (52')

2018 *L'IRAN A COURT D'EAU* (54')

2018 «*ARCHIFAUX - VRAIES VILLES ET FAUX MONUMENTS*» 52' + VR

2017 «*INDONESIE : LA PUISSANCE, L'ISLAM ET LA DEMOCRATIE*» 2 x 52'

DIRECTOR'S NOTE OF INTENT

Formally at this point I am basing my work on my last two geopolitical films:

-*Emirats* 2x52 minutes for Arte (2014) / *Indonésie* 2x52 minutes for Arte (2016).

Formally these films were based on the same principles:

Listening to singular words and generally absent from the media (witnesses and actors of History).

To get closer to the other that we do not usually meet.

But also the reflections of high authorities (emirs or generals for «*les Emirats*», ministers or religious dignitaries for «*Indonésie*») which give the investigation -at the heart of the powers- a real in-depth work. Here we will meet heads of state, ministers, party leaders and activists.

The intervention of a scientific advisor, renowned for his expertise on the topic. Doublespeak, self-interested shortcuts or positions are also put at a distance or in perspective by the voice-over. I prefer the term voice-over to commentary (the famous commentary). It is the voice of a curious citizen-traveler, who transmits a knowledge that is built up through encounters and questioning. Neither too close, nor too far: a voice spoken with all the energy of a storyteller.

The image editing is not an adaptation of a pre-established text that must absolutely fit into the image. The voice-over narrative allows shortcuts or accelerations, allows a formal and creative game. A taste for taking into account sound or visual accidents, creating bridges and free associations. Pleasure to be educational. But not to forbid oneself to express a subjectivity, while avoiding any narcissism or self-centeredness (it goes without saying!).

Most of the viewers will discover a worrying maelstrom that they did not even imagine. A worried population, military men and women in an uproar, gas lobbyists, environmentalists but also spies... There are dirty tricks, bad faith, special interests, grand plans, and vital national issues. Everything necessary to conceive a vast investigation, carried by our feverish interrogations.

The director's access to important protagonists in order to decipher for us a very European geopolitical issue.

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